

South Central MIRECC Communiqué

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“Closing the efficacy-effectiveness gap”

Update on MIRECC Fellows

Nancy Jo Dunn, Ph.D., Mark Kunik, MD, MPH, and Brenda Schubert

In 2001, we accepted our first class of Fellows into the VA South Central MIRECC Special Fellowship in Advanced Psychiatry and Psychology that is based at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center in Houston. Mark Kunik, MD, MPH is the Psychiatry Director and Nancy Jo Dunn, Ph.D. is the Psychology Director of the Fellowship program. The goal of this 2-year Fellowship program is to train future psychiatry and psychology leaders to become outstanding clinical researchers in high priority areas of mental health.

We thought that everyone would be interested in the Fellows’ areas of interest, and what those who have graduated are currently doing. The Fellows have provided an update in their own words.

Serena Chu, Ph.D. (2001-03), Psychology Fellow:

“As a Scientific Review Administrator for the National Institute of Mental Health, Division of Extramural Activities, I am responsible for all aspects of planning, coordinating, directing, and implementing peer reviews of grant applications. I ensure that applications received in mental health interventions research receive appropriate technical review, and that the committee operates effectively, efficiently, and in accordance with established department policies and procedures. I will preside over the administrative portion of review meetings and assist the chairperson in the conduct of the reviews.” Prior to this position and upon completion of her postdoctoral training, Dr. Chu was the Equity & Special Populations Portfolio Manager with the Department of Veterans Affairs, Health Services Research and Development Service in Washington, DC.

Paul Rowan, Ph.D., MPH (2002-04), Psychology Fellow:

“I am a research fellow at the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, Department of Behavioral Sciences, and I am supported by a National Cancer Institute R25 Postdoctoral Training Fellowship. My research areas include researching psychological factors explaining health behaviors, especially smoking; researching socioeconomic differences in smoking rates and smoking cessation success. I am currently conducting studies concerning smoking cessation. This includes a study using ecological momentary assessment to understand cessation differences between white, black, and hispanic smokers, and helping develop a mindfulness-based manualized group smoking cessation intervention.”

Ignacio Valdes, MD, MS (2002-04), Psychiatry Fellow:

“I’m a NIDA Fellow in neurological imaging in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Texas Health Science Center, Houston, TX. I am conducting research on impulsivity among substance abusers using fMRI.”

Ellen Teng, Ph.D. (2003-05), Psychology Fellow:

“My research interests include the assessment and treatment of anxiety disorders and promoting mental health in diverse populations. To date, my research has focused on the etiology and treatment of obsessive-compulsive spectrum disorders, panic disorder, and increasing Asian American mental health awareness. I plan to extend my current research to examine variations in the expression of anxiety disorders and the effectiveness of existing treatments for diverse individuals. Future plans include developing new treatments or altering existing ones to be more culturally relevant and to incorporate neuroimaging in studying the underlying mechanisms of anxiety disorders and pathways to change.” Dr. Teng has accepted a position as Assistant Professor of Psychology at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale upon the completion of her Fellowship training in August 2005.

David Graham, MD, MS (2003-06), Psychiatry Fellow:

“My research interests globally involve the outcomes and health service use for patients with persistent cognitive deficits. Currently I am focusing on deficit awareness in persons with Alzheimer's dementia. Deficit awareness impacts the management and treatment of patients who may engage in unsafe tasks, placing themselves at risk and distressing their caregivers. Better assessment of deficit awareness could help illuminate the need for proper and timely medical, psychiatric, or legal interventions. I am working toward determining how deficit awareness contributes to adverse events for both patient and their caregiver. My intent is that by directly examining the interaction between deficit awareness and adverse outcomes, we will gain insight into better identifying at-risk individuals. Possible adverse outcomes for the caregiver include self-neglect and safety, anxiety, depression, increased burden, and increased service utilization. Possible adverse outcomes for the patient would be institutionalization, self-neglect and safety, anxiety, depression, decreased quality of life, and increased service utilization.”

Scott Cardin, Ph.D. (2004-06), Psychology Fellow:

“Since starting the postdoctoral fellowship, my research efforts have centered on using language analyses to inform treatment of veterans suffering from chronic PTSD. More specifically, it has focused on identifying linguistic markers of change and underlying beliefs via language analyses, including metaphor analysis. Other recent research examined linguistic characteristics of expert therapists and their proposed effect on the therapeutic relationship. Additionally, I have examined the automatic activation of beliefs in response to exposure to violent metaphor (metaphor that when taken literally, is violent). My research interests also include: guilt, coping skills, psychotherapy process, change, and application of single-case design, methodology, and statistics.”

Sreelatha Pulakhandam, MD (2004-06), Psychiatry Fellow:

“My research interests are understanding and evaluating various treatment modalities for bipolar disorder across lifestyle, producing appropriate psychobiological measures to determine changes in neurocognitive functions, research on physiological and behavior changes using novel pharmacotherapy, determining neurochemical and gross anatomical changes in brain using neuroimaging techniques which could eventually lead to obtaining optimum diagnostic tools in evaluating mood disorders.”

We are very proud of all of our Fellows and greatly appreciate all of the support of the South Central MIRECC in the Fellows' career development.



Web Presentation on Helping Families with Substance Abuse

The MIRECC *Bringing Science to Practice* web-based conference series presents **Steven Scruggs, Ph.D.**, on “**Helping Families with Substance Abuse Community Reinforcement And Family Training (CRAFT): Support and Prevention,**” **May 19, noon to 1:00 PM CT.** Dr. Scruggs is a clinical psychologist at the Oklahoma City VA Medical Center. Dr. Scruggs will present a summary of his clinical education project funded in 2001.

The PowerPoint slides for Dr. Scruggs’s presentation can be downloaded from a VA-networked computer at <http://vawww.visn16.med.va.gov/mirecc.htm> beginning May 18. The live audioconference can be accessed May 19 at **1-800-767-1750, access code 45566#**. For additional information about this program, contact Tonya.welch@med.va.gov.



MIRECC Leaders Meet in Jackson to Prepare for Review

In June 2005, the South Central MIRECC will have its first 5 year review by the VA. The MIRECC Directors have been very busy for the past 6 months preparing for this review. Our MIRECC is required not only to submit a 20 page document describing our accomplishments but also to make a one-hour oral presentation for a panel of 7 reviewers. To prepare for the oral presentation the leadership of the South Central MIRECC and a small group of advisors met in Jackson, MS, in early April. The MIRECC Directors (Drs. Sullivan, Kauth, Vasterling, Kunik, and Kirchner) and Kathy Henderson, MD, rehearsed their oral presentations and received helpful feedback.

Graciously serving as mock reviewers for this practice session were Terry Keane, Ph.D., Director of the National Center for PTSD, Behavioral Sciences Division, at the VA Boston Healthcare System; Grayson Norquist, M.D., MSPH, newly appointed Chair of the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Mississippi; Tom Mosley, PhD, Professor in the Department of Internal Medicine at the University of Mississippi; Mark Enderle, M.D. and Mary Jones from the VISN 16 office; four directors of mental health from VISN 16 medical centers (Vance Hamilton, M.D., Maga Jackson-Triche, M.D., MSHS, Jeff Clothier, M.D., and Roy Reeves, Ph.D., D.O.) and our own Pat Dubbert, Ph.D.

The meeting began with a presentation by Dr. Norquist who spoke on the topic of how to make research relevant to communities. Dr. Norquist, who traveled extensively and observed many health and mental health care systems nationally and internationally in his role as Director of the National Institute of Mental Health Division of Services & Intervention Research, presented a broad but very practical view of the status of mental health research in the US. Among other topics, he described the need to have clinicians involved with researchers. Many of the very approaches for which he advocated are indeed approaches that we are testing within the MIRECC, confirming for the MIRECC leadership that we seem to be “on track” in terms of producing meaningful work. In addition, MIRECC Team Leaders gave progress reports, and, under the direction of Dr. Keane, the group began the process of strategic planning for the next five years of funding.

Special thanks goes to Ms. Brenda Schubert for locating wonderful lodging and meeting accommodations and for coordinating the two-day event.

National MIRECC Conference Addresses Risk, Rehabilitation and Recovery

A national MIRECC conference on *Risk, Rehabilitation and Recovery: Treating Mental Illness in the VA* will be held **June 6-8, 2005, at the Astor Crowne Plaza Hotel, New Orleans, LA**. The conference is designed to present evidence-based research about suicide assessment, dual diagnosis, recovery models, and treating deployed veterans as mandated by the President's New Freedom Commission, as well as promote the development and dissemination of empirically supported mental health research and clinical interventions.

Conference co-sponsors include the MH QUERI, the National Centers for PTSD, the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, the American Association of Suicidology, Readjustment Counseling Service (Vet Centers), National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI), and the U.S. Army.

Accreditation for this program has been applied for.

Everyone who attends must register! To register, go to www.mirecc.chepinc.org. The conference is free to federal employees.

To make hotel reservations, call the Astor Crowne Plaza Hotel at 888-696-4806.

For a copy of the program, email Kim.gordley@med.va.gov or call 410-642-2411 x5403.

Meet the Program Assistant Series

This month we begin a series on the MIRECC Program Assistants. Among their varied responsibilities, the Program Assistant is often the first person that people have contact with at the MIRECC Office at each anchor site. We have asked each of them to write a small piece about themselves and their work in order for you to know them better. This month we are pleased to introduce Ms. Lauren Clifton.



Hello everyone! My name is Lauren Clifton and I am the OKC MIRECC Program Support Assistant for Drs. Michelle Sherman and Tom Teasdale.

A little background information...I am an Oklahoma native, (born and raised in Oklahoma City), and am the younger of 2 children. I graduated in May 2004 from the University of Oklahoma with a BA in Psychology. I have taken the last year off to work and will be returning to OU this June to begin graduate school in pursuit of my Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology. Although I will be starting the doctoral program this summer, I will continue my half time position with the MIRECC. I recently became engaged to my high school sweetheart and we are planning to marry in March 2006. In my free time I enjoy spending time with my family and friends, playing with our 3 dogs, reading, scrap booking, watching movies, golfing, going to the lake, taking walks, and just being outside.

I began working half time as a Program Support Assistant for the MIRECC staff at the OKC VAMC (Drs. Michelle Sherman and Tom Teasdale) in September 2004. This position has been a wonderful learning experience for me. It is hard to describe a typical day, because no two days are the same for me. I assist Dr. Sherman with two monthly meetings. The first is the SAFE (Support and Family Education) meeting. This meeting is for family members and friends of veterans with serious mental illnesses. Each month a different topic is highlighted to help these family members and friends learn more about their loved one's

mental illness, and also how to cope themselves. The second meeting is the Mental Health Consumer Council Meeting, which is comprised of veterans and community members and whose mission is to provide a consumer voice to the mental health administration.

In addition to these tasks, I help with subject recruitment, data entry, data analysis, monthly mailings and phone call reminders, locating reference materials and various articles, and manuscript/grant preparation. Most recently I have taken on the task of becoming the fund control point clerk for the MIRECC funds here in OKC. Also, I am training to code qualitative data (through Ethnograph) in the pilot study interviews Dr. Sherman recently completed.



SC MIRECC Clinical Partnership Program

We would like to encourage all MIRECCers to read the lead article in the May issue of *Psychiatric Services* entitled “Facilitating Intervention Research from the Bottom Up: A Novel Role for Services Researchers” which describes the MIRECC Clinical Partnership Program. The Clinical Partnership Program is innovative in that it tests a “bottom up” approach to producing clinical evidence rather than the more typical “top down” approach of imposing practices that are derived from research evidence. Under the direction of JoAnn Kirchner, MD, this MIRECC program has supported innovative interventions at four VAs in our Network. These innovative programs were designed and have been led by Eve Wiseman, MD, (Little Rock); Carol Phillips, MD (Fayetteville); Janet Gearin, RN (Muskogee/ Tulsa), and Ron Murphy PhD (New Orleans). In addition to Dr. Kirchner, Snigdha Mukherjee, PhD and Dana Perry, MA, have helped to facilitate these interventions; and Debra Hollis, BA has provided administrative support. We are delighted that this program is receiving national attention and hope to be able to continue some version of the Clinical Partnership Program in the coming years.



CONGRATULATIONS GO TO...

Several individuals were recognized at the South Central MIRECC retreat for their outstanding service or accomplishments during the past year. Below are the award recipients:

JoAnn Kirchner, M.D., *Major Contributor Award*
 Thomas A. Teasdale, DrPH, *Excellence in Education Award*
 A. Lynn Snow, Ph.D., *Excellence in Research Award*
 Carol Phillips, M.D., *Clinical Leadership Award*
 Lisa Martone, APN, *Clinical Care Award*
 Michelle Sherman, Ph.D., *Best Publication by a Junior Investigator*
 Joseph I. Constans, Ph.D., *Best Publication by a Senior Investigator*
 Patricia Dubbert, Ph.D., *Excellence in Research Training*
 Michael Kauth, Ph.D., *Special Contribution Award For Outstanding Service as Acting Director February, 2004 – September, 2004*
 Melonie Shelton, *Special Contribution Award*

An “ASK THE EXPERT” Conference Call

The MIRECC Substance Abuse Group invites clinicians, researchers, and administrators to participate in a 50-minute conference call with **Eve Wiseman, M.D.** on “**The Status of Pharmacotherapy for Substance Use Disorders,**” **May 17, 1:00 PM CT.** Dr. Wiseman will provide an update on currently available medications for treatment of psychoactive substance use disorders, including the newly-approved medications acamprosate and buprenorphine. Dr. Wiseman is not only an active clinician, but she is engaged in productive research. To date she has 14 first author journal articles and three book chapters. She has been Principle Investigator on four grants.

For background and content, it would be helpful to refresh your familiarity with Module P (Addiction Focused Pharmacotherapy) of the joint VA/DoD Clinical Practice Guidelines for Substance Use Disorders. The module can be accessed at the Office of Quality Performance web site:

http://www.oqp.med.va.gov/cpg/SUD/SUD_CPG/ModuleP/frameset.htm.

The conference call can be accessed at **1-800-767-1750, access code 23400#.**



May Conference Calls

1-800-767-1750

- 2—Education Core, 2:00 PM CT, access code 16821#
- 2—Schizophrenia Team, 3:00 PM CT, access code 20061#
- 10—Directors Call, 3:00 PM CT, access code 19356#
- 11—Neuroimaging Group, 9:00 AM CT, access code 24394#
- 12—National MIRECC Education Group, 1:00 PM CT, access code 28791#
- 16—Disorder Team Leaders, 2:00 PM CT, access code 20143#
- 17—Substance Abuse Team, General, 1:00 PM CT, access code 23400#
- 18—Program Assistants, 2:00 PM CT, access code 43593#
- 23—PRECEP Call, 11:00 AM CT, access code 39004#
- 24—Directors Call, 3:00 PM CT, access code 19356#

The next issue of the *South Central MIRECC Communiqué* will be published June 6, 2005. Deadline for submission of items to the June newsletter is May 31. Urgent items may be submitted for publication in the *Communiqué Newsflash* at any time. Email items to the Guest Editor, Allen Thomas, Ph.D., at Allen.Thomas3@med.va.gov or FAX to (504) 585-2954.

South Central MIRECC Internet site: www.va.gov/scmirecc/

SC MIRECC intranet site: vaww.visn16.med.va.gov/mirecc.htm

National MIRECC Internet site: www.mirecc.med.va.gov